

**Freeman, Carla. 2014. *Entrepreneurial Selves: Neoliberal Respectability and the Making of a Caribbean Middle Class (Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies Series)*. Durham, London: Duke University Press. xii + 258 pp. Pb.: \$24.95. ISBN: 9780822358039.**

I picked up this book seeking theoretical insight and ethnographic specificity about the “middle class”. Like Freeman, I noticed a lack of specificity about the term, even as it seemed to be more broadly applied. In *Entrepreneurial Selves*, I found rich insight that goes beyond the usual analyses of class: it is an ethnography of economics, labour, and affect in a time and place of neoliberalism. It is about what it means to be ‘respectable’ and ‘middle class’ in Barbados today and how these concepts work in tandem, in ways that are gendered and culturally particular (p. 1). Based on over a decade of research with entrepreneurs in Barbados, Freeman’s ethnography finds that entrepreneurialism among the middle class is not just about self-employment, income generation, and an economic matter of business. Instead, entrepreneurialism is a ‘subtler, generalized way of being and way of feeling in the world’ (p. 1). In this sense, entrepreneurialism has become a mode of labour and a way of life; a means of earning a living but also of ‘making a life more generally’ (p. 116). As Freeman writes, ‘being entrepreneurial, I came to see, was being expressed as much in relation to new forms and fantasies of self-understanding, intimacy, parenting, spirituality, and so on, as it was in terms of “running the shop”. These forms of entrepreneurialism reflect and call upon a rapidly changing cultural milieu in which affective relations and affective labour are central’ (p. 6).

Throughout the book, Freeman traces individual entrepreneurial trajectories of Barbadian women across race, age, and class origins that ‘illustrate new ways of being and new ways of defining the self in a culture of neoliberalism’ (p. 49). For example, the reader is introduced to ‘Colleen’ in Chapter 1, *Barbadian Neoliberalism and the Rise of a New Middle-Class Entrepreneurialism*. Colleen left a secure job at a bank to become an entrepreneur. She now leads motivational wellness and teambuilding expeditions. In her move from waged employee to owner, from service worker to entrepreneur, she rejects some of the most prized signs of middle-class livelihood and status in favour of ‘flexibility’ (p. 19). However, flexibility is not only a part of neoliberal discourse: flexibility has also been the keystone of a deeply rooted Caribbean cultural tradition: the reputation-respectability model. Colleen’s move from respectable Barbadian middle class to entrepreneur, therefore, represents a departure from middle-class ideologies of the colonial past, but her flexibility and adaptability is not only a quality of neoliberalism but a paramount feature of the Caribbean experience and culture.

In the following chapters, Freeman shows how entrepreneurs like Colleen seek flexibility in other aspects of their lives. In Chapter 2, *Entrepreneurial Affects: “Partnership” Marriage and the New Intimacy*, the focus is on entrepreneurs who desire a new form of intimate partnership, the companionate marriage. This new partnership ideal represents a shift in Barbadian social life, but not as a generic, globalising expression of modern love. Instead, Caribbean respectability imbues their quests for emotional, romantic and material partnership with distinct meanings.

The counterweight to marriage is the topic of Chapter 3, *The Upward Mobility of Matrifocality*. Matrifocality is the institution at the heart of lower-class Afro-Caribbean culture and the Creole complex of reputation: the woman or mother-centred family associated with flexible survival skills and the generalised strength of women. Through the “upward mobility” of matrifocality, a strong, caring femininity now stands at the economic and emotional center of middle-class entrepreneurial life (p. 102).

Chapter 4, *Neoliberal Work and Life*, is about how care, attunement, and nurturing lie at the heart of much of life and work today. Thus, new modes of parenting have emerged alongside new modes of doing business. Business and family life have become ‘saturated by an economy of emotion that has become part of the labour process in and across these spheres, offering enrichment and solace, worry and stress’ (p. 134).

How people manage the stresses and enhanced pleasures of entrepreneurial life is the topic of Chapter 5, *The Therapeutic Ethic and the Spirit of Neoliberalism*. Freeman traces the growing appeal of new forms of spiritual practice and belonging including new middle class ‘prosperity churches,’ a flourishing marketplace of self-help, counselling, bodily treatments, and an incipient ‘therapeutic culture’ (p. 169). Even business becomes a therapeutic encounter: as Colleen said, ‘I found myself in this’ (p. 181).

Therefore, the crux of neoliberal entrepreneurialism lies in the blurred boundaries between enterprise as a business, and the self (or child or couple) as an enterprise, between social relations of business and intimate economies of love and support. In this, there are many valuable theoretical and methodological insights. For one, neoliberalism is “malleable” within specific cultural and geographical contexts and here, ‘neoliberalism takes a Caribbean form’ (p. 209). This is also a call for a new analytics of class, where materiality and subjectivity together are understood as co-constitutive of class. To understand capitalism’s affective turn and the new middle class, one must look to the emotional registers of social relations and self-understandings while also analysing economy and structure.

The promises and expectations for self-employment and entrepreneurialism are all the more pronounced for women as we are increasingly expected to flexibly balance domestic and market-oriented work, and labours of care, nurturance, and love. For this reason, capitalism’s affective turn presents both intriguing opportunities and troubling foreclosures: ‘if feminist analyses of the long devalued feminine realm of reproductive labour have provided the groundwork for analyzing immaterial, and... affective labour in the formal market, then it is perplexing to hear that gender is suddenly being unhinged from this work at just the moment it is increasingly valuable in the global capitalist system’ (p. 214). Meanwhile, in Barbados, it seems that the upward mobility of matrifocality and the rise of a new affective economy at work and at home creates ‘possibilities for enacting new femininities, new masculinities, new intimacies, and new entrepreneurial selves’ (p. 215).

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